

Farm & Market Report

Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture

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Report Reveals Agriculture's Hold on the Commonwealth

Massachusetts agriculture today shows promise as a dynamic and vital industry, according to a new report published by the University of Massachusetts' Donahue Institute in conjunction with the state Department of Food and Agriculture. "Agriculture's Hold on the Commonwealth" credits local farmers' ability to respond to challenges for the industry's bright outlook.

Though Massachusetts farms are small, local farmers are discovering ways to make their farms more viable by getting the most from each acre, according to the report. Though Massachusetts ranks only 43rd among all states in agricultural production, it ranks 14th in net farm income per farm and fourth in net farm income per acre.

Bay State farmers are remaining viable despite challenges such as higher labor and other production costs than in many other states. Among other challenges Massachusetts farmers face:

- The Massachusetts growing season is short and taking measures to extend the season are costly.
- The percentage of the consumer dollar going to farmers has dropped; a larger portion now goes to cover costs within the food processing, transportation, and retailing sectors of the economy.
- The state's strong economy and its proximity to large population centers exert pressure to develop farmland for alternative uses.

Massachusetts farmers have responded to these challenges and found ways to benefit from their close proximity to consumers. The report includes a case study of one farm that has remained profitable by diversifying

REPORT, continued on page 3

Legislation Filed to Keep Protected Mass. Farmland Affordable for Farmers

Rep. Stephen Kulik (D-Turners Falls) has filed a bill designed to maintain the availability of affordable Massachusetts farmland for agricultural use. The legislation addresses a new real estate market trend that is threatening to thwart one of the objectives of the state's Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program.

"In parts of Massachusetts an estate market now exists where the highest resale value of APR protected land is no longer its agricultural value," explains Kulik. "There is now a class of real estate buyers, many of whom have little or no interest in agriculture, who are willing to pay significantly above the agricultural value for an APR farm for the opportunity of living on a beautiful, pastoral property surrounded by protected open space."

Under the APR Program, the state purchases from a farmer, a restriction on his or her agricultural property. The farmer receives the difference between the land's agricultural value and its fair market value. The farmer continues to own the land and retains the right to sell it, lease it, or will it to his or her heirs. The restriction states that the farm must remain in agriculture in perpetuity even if sold or passed on to someone else.

The conversion of APR farms into estate-type properties is, in most cases, linked to whether or not there is a house or a potential for a house on the property. The legislation would authorize the Commissioner of Food and Agriculture to approve, upon findings of the Agricultural Land Preservation Committee, the release of one house lot from land protected under the program prior to 1992.

The house lot is released in exchange for an updated APR agreement with an option for the Commonwealth to purchase the land at agricultural value and the preclusion of constructing additional dwellings.

APR agreements since 1992 preclude houses from being built on the APR land in order to lock-in the land's agricultural value. If a landowner anticipates the need for a future dwelling, he or she is encouraged to exclude land from the APR for that purpose.

"In light of current real estate market conditions, we have been very hesitant to approve the new construction of dwellings on APR farms," says Commissioner Jonathan L. Healy. "Doing so is likely, in the long run, to remove APR land from commercial agriculture, thus defeating the intent of the program which is to protect Massachusetts farmland by keeping it affordable for farmers."

Since 1992, APR agreements also include a provision giving the Commonwealth or its assignee an option to acquire the APR land at agricultural value. "Without the option to acquire at agricultural value, some older APR properties are sold at prices far above agricultural value to the detriment of Massachusetts taxpayers, and especially future generations of Massachusetts farmers," Healy says.

An APR Advisory Panel, formed 18 months ago to study this problem, has endorsed the legislation to accommodate owners of pre-1992 APRs and safeguard taxpayers' investments.

"We realize that this legislation is a compromise, not a perfect solution to this unanticipated dilemma and may not be applicable to all older APRs. Participation is voluntary," says Healy. "We are striving to strike a balance between fair treatment of APR owners and ensuring that the millions of dollars that have been invested in these older APR farms continue to benefit future generations of Massachusetts farmers and taxpayers." ■



This publication is available in alternate formats upon request and on the World Wide Web at www.massgrown.org.



USDA Announces New Emergency Programs

Local USDA Farm Service Agency (FSA) field offices will begin accepting disaster program applications this month from farmers devastated by multiple years of inclement weather and poor crop prices.

Signup for the Crop Disaster Program starts January 18. This program will provide relief to farmers whose yields were impacted by adverse weather. Compensation for prevented planted crop acres and unharvested acres is also available.

Crop problems caused by a lack of heat and excessive rain triggered the need for quality loss assistance. This program is being developed and a signup will be announced at a later date.

The Apple Market Loss Assistance Program will provide \$100 million to help offset low market prices experienced during 1998 and 1999 crop years. Signup will begin January 18.

Some \$38 million is available to pay apple and potato producers because of quality losses to 1999 and 2000 crops. Eligible causes of loss are fire blight, hail, hurricanes and other adverse weather. A signup period will be announced.

Apple farmers will also have the Special Apple Loan Program to provide operations capital during this period of low prices. Applicants may obtain loans up to \$300 per acre of productive apple trees, with a maximum of \$500,000. There is \$99 million available. Applications are now being accepted.

Dairy Market Loss Assistance (DMLA III) payments will automatically be issued later this month to producers who were enrolled in last years Dairy Market Loss program. Payments will also be available to new operations and to operations that did not have 12 months of milk marketings established. The four-week signup period for these producers will begin in late January.

Up to \$20 million will be available under the Cranberry Crop Market Assistance Program to help offset low market prices experienced during the 1999 crop year. Farmers will be notified about the application process.

As these programs are finalized, producers will be notified of the enrollment periods and program provisions. ■

FARM-CITY CONNECTIONS

"Growing Minds through School Gardens"

A panel of nursery professionals will be among the featured speakers at the school gardening meeting January 27th at UMass Boston. The program also includes teachers, principals, writers and representatives of 12 agencies and associations dedicated to the concept that there is a definite place for gardening in the school curriculum.

Success stories about local school garden programs will highlight the morning program. Educators will also have ample time to meet informally with their peers involved with gardening, as well as learn about educational resources.

School gardening programs can complement environmental education as well as science, agriculture, math, language arts, history, social sciences and nutrition.

A survey last year by UMass Extension in Amherst showed a variety of innovative programs in place across the state. Will Snyder of Extension will report on this survey and discuss building a state network of support for learning through gardening in the classroom.

The nursery panel discussion will feature Greg Gaklis of Gold Star Nursery in Lexington, Ed Bemis of Bemis Farms Nursery, Spencer, and Josh Wright of Garden Craft in Hanover. Local school success stories will include talks and slide presentations by schools in Cambridge, Lexington, Boston, Brimfield, Northampton and more! Another feature is a tour of the UMass Boston greenhouse with Jim Allen of the Biology Department.

A meeting with similar goals is planned for April 7 at UMass Amherst. For more information, phone Janet Christensen at 617-626-1735 or e-mail jchristensen@state.ma.us

Sign up for Agriculture in the Classroom!

Upcoming teacher workshops include: February 10, Nourse Farm, Whately-- Tissue Culture March 10, Bonanno Farm, Methuen-- Soil Mapping/GPS March 31, UMass Amherst-- Integrated Pest Management.

If you have a suggestion for a workshop at your farm and/or would like to get involved with Ag in the Classroom, phone Debi Hogan at 508-336-4426 or e-mail dchogan@sprynet.com. ■

MDFA Encourages Participation in Affirmative Marketing Program

The Commonwealth's Affirmative Marketing Program continues to create and expand initiatives aimed at increasing economic opportunities for minority and women owned businesses through the State Office of Minority and Women Business Assistance (SOM-WBA).

SOMWBA certifies businesses that meet certain criteria. SOMWBA certification is a marketing tool used to enhance a business's ability to do business in public markets. Becoming SOMWBA certified may also assist a business seeking contracts with the government.

SOMWBA reviews certification applicants to determine that they meet the requirements of state and federal statutes and regulations. SOMWBA certifies businesses for both state and Federal Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE) certification programs.

For more information contact SOMWBA at 617-973-8692 or visit www.state.ma.us/somwba. You may also contact Alisha Bouchard at MDFA 617-626-1716 for further assistance. ■

FarmNet of the Pioneer Valley

A free information, referral and consultation service for the farm community of Franklin, Hampshire and Hampden counties.
800-327-6002
413-549-1483 (Hampshire Co.)

Farm & Market Report Monthly

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Looking Ahead to Summer

Chefs Guide to Mass. Farm Products to be Updated

A guide which lists over 100 farms who sell to area restaurants is currently being updated for the 2001 season. Farms listed in the first edition should have received a survey in the mail to update their listing. Additional farms who would like to be included but who did not receive the survey can contact David Webber at 617-626-1754 david.webber@state.ma.us for more information.

Farmers' Market Opportunity

A new farmers' market to be held in West Barnstable is seeking vendors for the 2001 season. The market will be held Wednesdays and Saturdays from 8:00 am- Noon adjacent to the Railroad Station on Route 149 near the intersection of Route 6A. For more information contact Chris Caldwell at 508-775-2029.

For general information on Massachusetts farmers' markets, contact David Webber, 617-626-1754, fax 617-626-1850, david.webber@state.ma.us. ■

REPORT, continued from page 1

at its production and marketing activities. By direct marketing through a farmstand, engaging in value-added enterprises such as baked goods and selling the farm experience through agri-tourism, the farmer has been able to keep the farm in business.

The state's level of self-sufficiency in products important to Massachusetts agriculture has climbed from 19 percent in 1975 to nearly 32 percent in 1997.

"Agriculture's Hold on the Commonwealth," written by UMass faculty members David Holm, Dan Lass, Richard Rogers, and David Damery, also includes a look at the state's food processing and forestry sectors.

"I know this publication will prove to be most useful to a wide audience. It should certainly help policy makers understand the importance of agriculture to our economy and communities," said Jonathan L. Healy, Massachusetts Commissioner of Food and Agriculture. "It should also help established and new-entry farmers in making sound business decisions."

An executive summary is available by contacting the Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture toll free at 877-627-7476 or on the web at www.massdfa.org. The full report, including data used in the analysis, will be available soon. ■

AGRI-TOURISM NEWS

Agriculture Featured in Getaway Guide

The Department of Food and Agriculture has received free advertising placement in the 2001-2002 *Massachusetts Getaway Guide*, compliments of Patrick Moscaritolo, President of Greater Boston Convention and Visitor's Bureau. The ad features the "Massachusetts grown...and fresher!" logo, web site address and toll-free consumer telephone line.

The Bureau of Markets is extremely grateful for this generous contribution in promoting state's agricultural industry. The *Getaway Guide* is produced by Pohly & Partners. Kristen Gillespie, National Sales Manager facilitated the ad placement donation.

Agri-tourism Guide to be Updated

Farms that wish to be listed in the 2001-2002 *Massachusetts Down on the Farm Agri-tourism Directory*, are asked to call Anneli Johnson for a questionnaire. Leave your name and address on her voice mail 617-626-1755 and ask for the agri-tourism form. Farms that are presently listed in this publication will receive a print-out of their information for review.

The Massachusetts Office of Travel & Tourism (MOTT) plans to launch their newly re-designed web site -- www.massvacation.com -- in mid January 2001. You can get added exposure for your business by featuring a special offer for American Express Card members on the new "Amex Offer" page on massvacation.com. This is available free of charge. You can increase your reach by also choosing to post your offer on the www.americanexpress.com Offer Zone for a minimal maintenance fee \$150/quarterly. For the fax-form, please contact Alison Riley at 617-426-1126.

Agricultural Directional Signage information is available by calling Anneli Johnson at 617 626-1755. ■

Mass. Farm Fact

In 2000 Massachusetts potato growers harvested 2,500 acres with an average yield of 255 cwt per acre, producing a total of 638 million pounds of potatoes.

CLASSIFIEDS

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Farming Opportunities: seeking both assistant farm manager and interns for 2001. For the right person position could evolve into Y/R mgmt position or partnership. Ran Old Depot Gardens, now expanding onto new 50 acre farm in Granby, MA. Organic vegs, fruits, flowers & greenhouse crops w/ emphasis on retail CSA. Call Ryan, 413-367-2395.

How to Place a Classified Ad

Classified ads are accepted free-of-charge on a first-come basis only. Limit: 25 words. Be sure to include a phone number. No display ads will be accepted. Only one listing per issue unless space permits. Ads may run in consecutive issues, space permitting, providing we are notified before the deadline for each issue.

Ads must be of interest to Massachusetts farmers. The Mass. Dept. of Food and Agriculture reserves the right to refuse any listing it deems inappropriate for publication.

Send typewritten or neatly printed copy to: Farm & Market Report, Mass. Dept. of Food and Agriculture, 251 Causeway St., Suite 500, Boston, MA 02114, fax: 617-626-1850, dbaedeker@state.ma.us or call 617-626-1752.

PEAS Conference Returns

The Providing Education through Agriculture For Students (PEAS) one day conference, sponsored by NOFA/Massachusetts and The Human Ecology Program at Greenfield Community College, will be held March 31, 2001 at Greenfield Community College, in Greenfield, MA.

The conference brings educators, farmers and others with an interest in agriculture, together for networking, learning and sharing. This year's conference will have 20 workshops, as well as a performance by Davis Bates, and a discussion forum during the noon-time break.

Registration is \$45; NOFA/Mass members receive a \$10 discount. Exhibitors are welcome to participate as well. Contact Pat Stewart, Conference Coordinator at Farm@hamesaxle.com or 978-827-1305. ■

Practical Nutrient Management Workshop Series

Workshops that will provide practical information about comprehensive nutrient and manure management planning, interpreting soil tests, and using pre-sidedress nitrate testing are planned for farmers at five locations around the state.

- January 30 - FSA Offices, Holden
- February 6 - First Parish Church United, Westfield
- February 22 - American Legion, Hatfield
- March 1 - Whites Restaurant, Westport
- March 8 - DEM office, Pittsfield (to be confirmed)

Extension Specialists will be on hand for individual consultation for field, vegetable and horticultural crops. This year a roundtable format will allow farmers to share their experiences and ask questions about their own farm operations. Bring your soil tests for consultation!

The Nutrient Management Workshops are hosted by your county conservation districts and Rural Conservation and Development Councils and sponsored by the USDA, NRCS and FSA, UMASS Cooperative Extension, MDFA, and the New England Small Farm Institute.

The workshops are free, but registration is required for lunch! For information contact NESFI at 413-323-4531 or email info@smallfarm.org. ■

Calendar

- ◆ Feb. 3 **14th Annual NOFA/Mass. Winter Conference**, at the Quabbin Regional High School, 800 South St., Barre. Sponsored by the Northeast Organic Farming Association/Mass. Chapter. For more information, call Elaine Peterson, 508-928-4707. For registration and exhibit space contact Karen Franczyk, 978-297-3644 or Julie Rawson, 978-355-2853, e-mail: jackkitt@aol.com.
- ◆ Feb. 23 **Massachusetts Maple Month Kick-off Event** at Boisvert's Sugar Shack, North Hadley. Sponsored by the Mass. Maple Producers Assoc. in cooperation with MDFA. For more information, contact David Webber, MDFA, 617-626-1754 or e-mail David.Webber@state.ma.us.
- ◆ Feb. 26-28 **New England Farm Direct Marketing Conference**, Holiday Inn & Conference Center, Manchester, N.H. Contact Charlie Touchette, 413-529-0386.
- ◆ March 3, 10, 17, 24 & 31 **Overlook Farm Pancake Weekends** featuring their Maple sugaring operation, 9:00 - 1:00 for more information contact Overlook Farm at 508-886-2221.
- ◆ March 17-25 **New England Spring Flower Show** at the Bayside Expo Center, Boston. Sponsored by the Massachusetts Horticultural Society. Call 617-536-9280 for information.
- ◆ March 27 **Agriculture Day at the State House**. Farmers visit with their legislators to discuss issues, speaking program at the Grand Staircase, and Taste of Massachusetts reception in the Great Hall. For more information, contact Mary Jordan, MDFA, at 617-626-1750 or e-mail Mary.Moffitt@state.ma.us.
- ◆ May 26 & 27 **Massachusetts Sheep & Woolcraft Fair** at Cummington Fairgrounds. For information to participate or attend contact Secretary, Becky Peterson of Orchard Valley Farm, Leyden, Tel. 413-624-5562.

FSMIP Grant Proposals Due

Proposals are now being accepted for year 2001 grants to be awarded through the USDA Federal-State Market Improvement Program (FSMIP). The deadline for submitting proposals to the Department of Food and Agriculture is January 29th for the first round and April 26th for the second round.

FSMIP Grants are awarded to agricultural organizations for market development, market research, and marketing education projects.

Massachusetts received a grant in the amount of \$45,500 to work with Cooperative Development Institute (CDI) of Greenfield and the livestock producers in the northeast region to develop marketing cooperative.

This federal grant is administered through the state departments of agriculture. For more information and/or a copy of guidelines, contact Mary Jordan at 617-626-1750 or e-mail mary.moffitt@state.ma.us. ■

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